

# Weaning From the Breast - Resistance

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## Definition

- You want to stop breastfeeding, but your child resists
- Excessive breastfeeding means nursing more than 4 times per day after 6 months
- Excessive breastfeeding also means nursing for the wrong reasons
- Delayed breastfeeding means beyond 18 months. If you feel differently, continue to breastfeed. Just avoid the pitfalls listed below.
- Note: The AAP recommends mothers breastfeed until 12 months. After 12 months, they recommend continued nursing "if you and your baby desire it". The AAP does not state any deadline for nursing.

## Complications of Excessive or Prolonged Breastfeeding

Excessive breastfeeding can cause problems. It should be considered an important problem if it causes any of the below:

- Refusal to eat any solid foods and over 6 months old. Result: Hard to start after 9 months old. Reason: It's easier to suck than to chew.
- Anemia confirmed by a routine test at the age of 1 year. Reason: Breastmilk can only meet iron needs until 8 months.
- Tooth decay from comfort nursing
- Overweight from drinking too much breast milk
- Sleep problems: awakening at night to be nursed. Reason: Bad habit of nursing used to put to sleep.
- Inability to stay with a baby sitter. Reason: Child is exclusively breastfed and refuses a bottle.
- Older children often strongly resist weaning. Bad habits become harder to break with each passing month. After age 3, may need to be separated from the mother for several days to wean.

If your child has any of these problems, read the next section. Follow the tips on how to help your child become a better eater. You can do this without having to wean him all the way.

## Care Advice

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### How to Stop Excessive Breastfeedings

1. **What You Should Know About Excessive Breastfeedings:**
  - Breastfeeding too much can cause health or behavior problems. Those problems are listed above in Health Information.
  - Decrease feedings so they don't cause or worsen any of those problems.
  - Here are some tips to help.
2. **Reduce the Number of Milk Feedings Your Child Gets to 3 per Day:**
  - Get your child on a schedule of 3 main meals a day.
  - Also, offer 2 nutritious snacks that are not feeding at the breast.

3. **Start Some Feedings from a Sippy Cup (if this was not done at 6 months):**
  - Cup feedings are needed as substitutes for nursing. This is needed regardless of the age at which weaning occurs.
  - The longer he doesn't use a cup, the less willing he'll try it.
  - Ideally, start daily cup feedings by 6 months of age. This is a natural way to keep breastfeedings from becoming overly important.
4. **Start Baby Foods or Solids (if this was not done at 6 months):**
  - The longer he doesn't taste solid foods, the less willing he'll try them.
  - Ideally, start spoon feedings by 6 months of age. This is another natural way to keep nursing from becoming overly important.
5. **Stop Using Nursing to Fall Asleep:**
  - Stop this immediately.
  - All babies can handle a 7 to 8 hour fast by 6 months of age. That means they can easily sleep through the night.
  - But if they are nursed until asleep, they will learn a bad habit. After normal night awakenings, they will want the breast to get back to sleep.
6. **Stop Any Night Time Breast Feedings:**
  - Ideally, this should have been done before 6 months.
  - If not, ask for help or information in stopping night time feedings.
7. **Start Complete Weaning Now or Later:**
  - Once you have made these healthy changes, you don't need to do anything more. When to wean your child is your choice.
  - After 12 months of age, nursing interactions become more important to your child. It becomes more of a habit with each passing month. Weaning will become harder.
  - Caution: Do not start weaning if your family is under stress (such as moving). Also wait if your child is under stress. An example of this is entering a new child care.

## [How to Stop Breastfeeding Completely \(Weaning\)](#)

1. **Delayed Weaning from the Breast - How to Stop Breast Feeding Completely:**
  - Delayed weaning from the breast means your child is over 18 months old.
  - You want to stop breast feeding, but your child doesn't want to.
  - Also called weaning resistance.
  - This bad habit will become harder to break with each passing month.
  - Here are some tips that should help.

2. **Offer Formula or Pumped Milk in a Cup Before Each Breastfeeding:**
  - If you stop breastfeeding after 9 months, you may be able to wean your baby directly to a cup.
  - **Caution:** If younger than 9 months, wean to a bottle and not to a cup. Most young babies can't drink well enough from a cup to get adequate nourishment.
  - At first, offer the cup after he has sucked some from the breast. This might be the only way your child will accept the cup.
  - After your child accepts the cup, offer pumped milk from a cup before nursing. You can also use formula for introducing the cup. You can also mix pumped milk with formula. If your child is older than 12 months, you can use whole milk.
  
3. **Gradually Stop Breastfeedings During the Day:**
  - Weaning to the cup should always be done slowly and with love. The "cold turkey" or abrupt withdrawal approach will make your child very upset.
  - First, stop the feeding that is least important to your child. This is usually the midday one.
  - About once a week drop out one more feeding. Replace each feeding with a cup feeding and extra holding.
  - The bedtime nursing is usually the last to be given up. You can continue bedtime nursing for months if that's what you prefer. But to prevent sleep problems, make it the first step in the bedtime ritual, not the last.
  - Some mothers prefer to start weaning by decreasing the length of feedings. Shorten all feedings by 2 minutes each week until they are 5 minutes long. Then stop them one at a time.
  
4. **Replace Nursing with Holding Your Child:**
  - Do not offer the breast after you have completed the weaning process.
  - Wear a top that completely hides your breasts.
  - Respond to ongoing requests to nurse by holding your child and comforting her.
  - Explain to your child that the milk is all gone from your breasts.
  
5. **Relieve Breast Pain:**
  - Weaning slowly will result in less pain from engorgement. Your breasts will gradually make less milk over time from less demand. Drop the number of breastfeedings gradually.
  - In the meantime, express just enough milk to relieve breast discomfort. Remember that complete emptying of the breast increases milk produced. Use a pump or manually express the milk for a minute or two.
  - Don't put your baby to the breast to relieve discomfort. Reason: She probably won't want to stop nursing.
  - A pain medicine such as ibuprofen can help.
  - You can also use an ice pack for 20 minutes.
  - It is normal to experience mood swings due to hormonal changes once you stop breastfeeding.

## Call Your Doctor Back If...

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- Your child is over 6 months of age and won't eat any baby foods
- Your child is over 6 months of age and won't drink from a cup
- You think your child has anemia
- This approach to weaning has not been successful after you have tried it for 1 month
- Your child is over 3 years old
- You think your child needs to be seen
- You have other questions or concerns

*This handout is intended for informational purposes only and should not be used as a substitute for the care and advice of a medical professional. The accuracy of the information contained in this handout is not guaranteed and there may be variations in treatment that your doctor or nurse may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.*

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